THE LIMNER COMPANY

GERVASE SPENCER (c.1715 - 1763)

A pair of portrait miniatures of Sir Robert Harland, 1st Baronet (and Admiral of the Blue) (1715-1784) and his Infant Daughter Frances (bap. 1749-1777)

Circa: circa 1755-59

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Watercolour on ivory (Robert Harland licence Q1BH554C/ Frances Harland licence 6ZDG7BQT)

Ovals, each 25 mm (1 in) high

His signed 'G.S' and dated 1759' (lower right)

Set into gold bracelet clasp frames with diamond borders, his with inscription 'Sir Robert Harland, Bt./ father to Countess Dillon/ died 1784' hers 'Frances Harland/ married Comte Edward Dillon/ August 1777/ and died October of the same year'

Sir Robert Harland, first baronet followed his father into the navy – his trajectory from able seaman, master's mate, and midshipman was fast and he passed his lieutenant's examination on 11 July 1735. He was at this time described as 'upwards of 20' but it may be assumed that he was, in fact, under age, since his father was one of his examiners.

Harland's first commission appears not to have been until 25 February 1742 when he became third lieutenant of the *Weymouth*; from her he was appointed to the *Princessa*, in which he was present in the action off Toulon on 11 February 1744; and a few days afterwards he moved into the *Namur* as first lieutenant. On 4 January 1745 he was promoted to the command of the fireship *Scipio*; and on 19 March 1746 he became captain of the *Tilbury* (60 guns), in which he took part in Hawke's engagement with *L'Étenduère* off Cape Finisterre on 14 October 1747. He was then appointed to the *Nottingham* (60 guns), in succession to Captain Philip Saumarez, who had been killed in the 14 October action.

On 31 January 1748, while with Hawke's squadron off Ushant, Harland in the *Nottingham* and Captain Charles Stevens in the *Portland* (50 guns) intercepted and, after a six-hour engagement, captured the French ship *Magnanime* (74 guns) limping back to Brest after being dismasted in a gale.

During the peace after 1748 Harland commanded the *Monarch* guardship at Portsmouth. On 1 November 1749 he married a daughter of Colonel Rowland Reynold, with a fortune of £40,000. They had three daughters, one of whom was Frances, her portrait in this locket, and a son, Robert.

After the outbreak of hostilities Harland was again at sea, from 20 March 1755, in the *Essex*, cruising in the channel and the Bay of Biscay. On 23 May 1758 he was appointed to the *Conqueror* (70 guns), and the following year he was sent into the Mediterranean with Boscawen. At Gibraltar he exchanged into the *Princess Louisa* (60 guns), in which he took part in the battle of Lagos on 18 August 1759.

On 18 October 1770 Harland was promoted rear-admiral of the blue, and in the following March he was created a baronet, and, with his flag in the *Northumberland*, went out to the East Indies as commander-in-chief, a post which he held until 1775. On 7 December 1775 he became vice-admiral of the blue, and in 1778 vice-admiral of the red. He hoisted his flag on board the *Queen* (90 guns) as second in command of the Channel Fleet under Admiral Augustus Keppel at the battle of Ushant on 27 July 1778, during which Harland commanded the van, and Palliser the rear, and in the October cruise. On 10 May 1779, after siding with Keppel at the time of his and Palliser's courts martial, he resigned his command. Under Lord Sandwich's administration he had no further command, but on the change of ministry he was appointed on 27 March 1782 to the Board of Admiralty under Keppel. On 8 April he became admiral of the blue. He quitted the Admiralty, with Keppel, on 28 January 1783, and on 21 February 1784 he died at Sproughton, near Ipswich. His son, Robert (1765–1848), succeeded to the baronetcy. [1] Harland was well regarded by Admiral Earl of St. Vincent, a man who did not convey such praise lightly. He was a friend of Rear-Admiral Sir John Lindsay.

His daughter, Frances, named after her grandmother, was baptised in 1749. Here in her portrait she appears around five or six years old but in 1777, at the age of twenty eight, she married Comte Edouard Dillon (1750–1839), an army officer and diplomat in the French service. As the engraving states on the reverse of her locket, she became Countess Dillon, but her title (and presumably happiness) were short lived as she died within a few months of their marriage.

This pair of portraits were likely worn as memorial bracelets after the death of Sir Robert in 1784.

[1] Sir Robert’s biography largely taken from Laughton, J., & Cock, R. (2008, January 03). Harland, Sir Robert, first baronet (c. 1715–1784), naval officer. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Retrieved 15 Sep. 2026, from https://www-oxforddnb-com.lonlib.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12333.